



New York State Library

Letters describing the Battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg

The Library's Manuscripts and Special Collections Unit has many collections related to the Civil War. In 2013, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of two major Civil War Battles, Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the Library digitized the letters below, which contain some descriptions of the battles.

Related Page:

- [Civil War Collections at the NYS Library](#)

Gettysburg

Braman, Waters Whipple (1840-?). Captain, 93rd New York Infantry.

Letters (1862-1865). 2 boxes (0.50 cu. ft.).

New York State Library call number: SC12780.

Born and raised in Troy, New York, Waters Whipple Braman enlisted December 7, 1861 to serve three years in the army. He mustered in 24 January 1862, as first lieutenant, Company C of the 93rd New York Infantry Regiment; he was discharged from service January 14, 1865. After the war, he settled in Watervliet, New York, and entered the lumber business.

The letters, addressed to Braman's family in Troy, include one written to his uncle after the Battle of Gettysburg.

[From a letter from Waters Whipple Braman to his Uncle on July 5, 1863:](#)  (1.36 MB)

Camp of 93d N.Y.V.
Near Gettysburg Pa.
July 5th, 1863

Dear Uncle,

... We have had an awful fight here, but thank the Lord, our Army has given the Rebels an ever-lasting thrashing. The heaviest fighting was yesterday, and to-day they are in full retreat, and our army entire is after them. This is the first time since the organization of the army of the Potomac that the rebels have met our men in open field, fight, and I don't believe they would this time but that (as the prisoners say) their officers told them they were to fight the militia, but they found to their cost that the old army of the Potomac was around. We must have taken about 8,000 prisoners. The loss in killed and wounded on both sides must be 25,000, and some say the rebels alone have lost that number. Gen'l Lee tried to come the flag of truce game on Gen'l Meade, but it failed to work. Gen'l Meade sent back that he would bury their dead for them.

We are encamped about $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile from Gettysburg, right on the Battlefield which is very large. I have seen but very little of it, as we have been momentarily under orders to be ready to move ...

Haynes, Calvin A. 125th New York Infantry, Co. E.

Letters (1862-1863). 25 items.

New York State Library call number: 19619

Calvin A. Haynes served as a sergeant in the 125th New York Infantry, which was raised in Troy, New York.

The letters, sent to Haynes's wife, include one letter talking about Gettysburg.

[From a letter from Calvin Haynes to his wife on July 19, 1863:](#)  (1.21 MB)

Loudon [Loudoun] Valley, Va.

July 19th, 1863

Dear Wife,

Not having heard from you in a great while, I did not know but what you would like to hear whether I am dead or alive. I am enjoying good health at present. We have had an awful march and a terrible battle. A great many of our boys were killed or wounded but I escaped without a scratch. It is a miracle that we were not all killed or wounded. We were in the thickest of the fight, making a charge on the Rebs a $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile through a fire of grape and cannister. Our Regt. lost a 100 men in 10 minutes. Our Co. lost 8 killed and 14 wounded. Stephen Hunt ... was wounded in the hip. I have not seen him since he fell ... Stephen was a good soldier full of his fun. We miss him.

This has been the hardest campaign the army of the Potomac ever had ... The 2d in the afternoon was the bloodiest part of the battle. At 2 p.m. they opened on us ... with over a 100 cannon. We lay flat on our faces for 2 hours. The air was filled with shell bursting in every direction. The battery that lay in front of us had 55 horses and 80 men killed ... That night and the next day [the Rebels] retreated leaving their dead and wounded on the field. I went over the field. Such a sight I never wish to see again. Every conceivable wound that can be thought of was there. There was so many wounded that it was impossible to attend to all of them. Some of them laying 48 hours in a drenching rain. It is beyond the power of me to describe a battle field ...

Inglis, John (b. 1841). Sergeant, 9th New York Cavalry, Co. D.

Papers (1862-1911). 1 box (0.25 cu. ft.).

New York State Library call number: SC22716.

John Inglis was a Scottish-born Canadian citizen (born, 1841; emigrated to Canada at age 14). In 1862, he traveled to New York State to enlist in the 9th Cavalry Regiment.

These papers consist chiefly of letters to his family detailing Inglis's experiences during the war. Two pocket diaries supplement the letters.

[From a diary from John Inglis July 1-4, 1863:](#)  (698 KB)

Diary entries:

Wednesday, July 1, 1863

The Battle of Gettysburgh commenced to-day. We opened the fight with 2 brigades of cavalry and a few pieces of artillery. The enemy shelled us out of our positions we fell back to the town when the infantry moved up. When we captured 500 prisoners; shelled severally by our own battery; we lost a few men.

Thursday, July 2, 1863

Went out scouting (our squadron); came in right of the Rebs and then marched back. The fighting commenced early again. Some bloody work done to-day. How many that was a live and full of life this morning now sleep the sleep of death. Left the field and went to Tannytown; out of rations.

Friday, July 3, 1863

The fight commenced with terrible canonading early this morning. Some fearful work

done to-day. Left Taneytown and went to Westminster. The Rebel prisoners coming in by the 1000s. 4800 came through town to-day.

Saturday, July 4, 1863

Vicksburgh Surrendered. Sent a letter to John Inglis and Crawford deserted. Left here and went to Fredrickb[urg]. The Rebels in full retreat. They suffered very heavy. Our loss prety severe

McLean Family, (William Clark McLean). 123rd New York Infantry, Co. G.

Papers (1844-1879). 5 boxes (1.5 cu.ft.).

New York State Library call number: SC20811.

William Clark McLean was born April 8, 1843, near Cambridge, New York. When the war began he was serving an apprenticeship in dentistry in Cambridge. He enlisted in the army on August 8, 1862, to serve three years. He mustered in as a corporal in Company G of the 123rd New York Regiment of the Infantry.

These papers include a letter that describes the battle at Gettysburg..

[From a letter from William Clark McLean to his brother on July 12, 1863:](#)  (1.57 MB)

Near Williamsport
9 miles from Hayertown
Near Fairplay, Md.
Sunday morning, July 12, 1863

Dear Bro. Henry:

You are probably going to church, as it is about 9 o'clock ...

I saw Dewitt Perine yesterday ... He was in fight at Gettysburgh. Says it was the hardest he ever saw. Lost 26 men in his Battery "B". I suppose you have heard that Otis Billings was killed and buried on the battle ground. We had in our Regt. only 3 killed and 3 wounded. Capt. Weir of Hebron Co. was shot in leg. Had to be amputated. The Rebels lost a good many men there at Gettysburgh. I was over the battlefield the 4th. Our men were burying the dead, put 15 or 20 in one grave (or rather hole). Our men were buried separately, and head boards put up with names on.

In the afternoon of the 4th we had a hard thunder storm. I put on my overcoat and sat with my back to a tree and had to just "grin and bear it" for 3 hours. I did not get wet through as those did who had no overcoats to put on. ...

Smith, James M. 149th New York Infantry, Co. G.

Letters (1863-1865). 18 items.

New York State Library call number: 20657.

James M. Smith lived in Skaneateles at the start of the war.

Wounded at Gettysburg, Smith was hospitalized at least through November 23; a letter to his brother on December 26 was written from Lookout Valley, Tennessee.

[From a letter from James Smith to his father, July 17, 1863:](#)  (836 KB)

Hospital of 12th Corps
near Gettysburgh July 17th, 1863

Dear Father,

My last was written from this place on or about the 4th inst. At present my health & appetite is verry good. For 5 or 6 days after my being wounded it was verry

difficult & sometimes impossible for me to rise from the ground without help & I lay without any blanket but the nights were mild & I did not suffer from this last deprivation. Now I have a blanket left by one of our patients & as we have had a few cold nights I have found it verry acceptable ... in a few weeks I suppose I will be considered fit to rejoin the rest ...

[From a letter from James Smith to his father, July 25, 1863:](#)  (1.14 MB)

U.S. Hospital at York, Pa.
July 25th, 1863

Dear Father,

I last wrote from Gettysburgh. I left there on the 19th & arrived here at night.

I would have written immediately but have only just succeeded in getting writing materials. During the last few days I have felt stiff & sore & have scarcely gone farther than from here to the dining room, about 100 yds. Distant ...

Our hospital is simply a piece of ground in the form of a square containing perhaps 20 acres & bounded on two sides by a double row of one story buildings & on the other 2 by a high and close board fence & was originally designed & used for a camp ground & barracks for soldiers ... The rooms are low ill ventilated, there is not a tree or bush on the ground & the number of seats outside the buildings is ferry small ... There is a post office & small soldiers library on the grounds ... Every man who is considered well enough can obtain a pass to go (out) into town once in 3 days between the hours of 1 & 5 p.m. ...

[From a letter from James Smith to his brother, July 29, 1863:](#)  (1.14 MB)

U.S. Hospital at York, Pa.
July 29th, 1863

Dear Brother,

... When I was wounded & assisted from the field on the 3d in a fainting condition I lost my knapsack &c., including your letters.

I was the only Skaneateles "boy" of the 149th (at least in our Co.) hurt at Gettysburgh but Dan McCord of Mottville had his leg wounded & amputated. He was doing well when I left him at the 12th Corps Hospital at G[ettysburgh]. I suppose we had about 35 men in our Co. in the battle; 2 were killed & 3 wounded; Lieut. Barnum was on picket the day of the battle & wounded himself in the foot by the accidental discharge of a pistol ... Col. Barnum was with us in battle until overcome by fatigue. Lieut. Col. Randall was with us until wounded by a ball through the breast; he was doing well at he Corps Hospital ... a son of Constable Thorpe of Skaneateles ... had the top of his thumb shot off at Gettysburgh ...

Vicksburg

Rhodes, Zadoc. 156th New York Infantry, Co. A.
Letters (1861-1866). 6 items.
New York State Library call number: 21657.

Zadoc and Theodore Rhodes enlisted for military service at Plattskill (Ulster County), New York, August 1862, and were both mustered in as privates. Zadoc attained the rank of commissary sergeant in

September 1864, and mustered out with his regiment at Augusta, Georgia, October 23, 1865.

The letters, addressed to William Terwilliger from various army camps in Louisiana, include one which comments on General Grant and the Union Army victory at Vicksburg.

[From a letter from Zadoc Rhodes to William Terwilliger on December 12, 1863:](#)  (1.42 MB)

Head Quarters, 156th Regiment, N.Y. Vol.
2d Reg't 1st Div. 19 Army Corps.
Baton Rouge, La., Dec. 12th 1863

Friend William,

You may think it very strange for me to write to you, as I never have written [sic], but ... there was always something in the way, and now I will endeavor to pen a few lines ... We have good news from the army of Tennessee and expect great news from the Potomac ... General Grant is the man of this war. He was the man at Vixburgh [sic] and Look-out Mountain, and I think he will be the man for Richmond yet ...

Smith, Jerry. 51st New York Infantry, I.
Letters (1861-1865). 1 box (0.25 cu.ft.).
New York State Library call number: SC22573.

The letters, sent to his family, include one in which he talks about the Battle of Vicksburg.

[From a letter from Jerry Smith to his brother, July 18, 1863:](#)  (585 KB)

Jaxson [Jackson], Mississippi
July 18th, 1863

Dear Brother,

... I spose you have hurd all about our movements have you not[?] We left Kentucky the 6 of June for Vixberg. We had a splendid time. A coming, we past through some splendid states ... We wer in camp to Sniders Bluff till Vixburg was taken. That was on the fourth of July. I spose you know we started after Jonson the fourth of July as quick as, he hurd Vixberg were taken, he started as quick as his boots would let him go, I reckon he came as far as Jaxson & then he under took to whip us, but he ditent come it quite ... Jonson is retreating to Mobeel, Alabama. Our men is right after him. I hear to day that hes crossed the river & taken considerable many prisoners. Ain't a very heavy force. We lost a very few men in the fight the count but one man wounded in our Reg't. The Regiment come out pretty luckkey in the whole Bridgade ... some eight or ten wounded. That is better then I expected ...

[From a letter from Jerry Smith to his mother, July 18, 1863:](#)  (1.07 MB)

Jaxson [Jackson], Mississippi
July the 18, 1863

Dear Mother,

I received your kind letter the 15th ... I believe I wrote to you when I was to Snider Bluff, if I am not mistaken. We moved the same day that Vixberg was taken, the 4th of July. That was a big thing on Lee. One [of] the strongest places that

the rebs had. We took twenty eight thousand prisoners of well men & nine thousand of wounded & sick. In all, makes 37,000 Then we started after Jonson ...